



VISTA Travel Guide for Sponsors

This guide provides an overview of the types of travel the VISTA program oversees. This document reflects changes that were made to VISTA Travel Policy published on April 9, 2012, effective June 1, 2012. For a summary of the changes, see page five of this document.

What are the types of travel the VISTA program covers?

1. **Relocation Travel:** Relocation travel is defined as all travel approved for AmeriCorps VISTA candidates who move from their home of record (HOR) by 50 miles or more in order to serve. VISTA candidates arrange their own travel and receive a relocation travel allowance based on the direct mileage from the HOR to the service site.
2. **Travel to Training:** The VISTA program provides travel to training events (Pre-Service Orientation and Leaders Orientation) for all VISTA candidates and members.
3. **Close of Service Travel:** VISTA candidates who received relocation assistance at the start of service for relocating 50 miles or more from their HOR to a new residence near their service site also qualify for close of service travel assistance. VISTA candidates arrange their own travel and receive a relocation travel allowance based on the distance between the service site and the HOR after successful completion of their year of service.
4. **Other:** The VISTA program also provides **Transfer Travel** for members transferring from one service site to another and **Emergency Travel** for members who experience a family emergency or natural disaster. See the [VISTA Member Handbook](#) for more information regarding these types of travel.

VISTA Relocation Travel

Who is eligible for relocation assistance?

VISTA candidates who:

- Sign up for a 12-month term;
- Move from their permanent address (Home of Record or HOR) to a new residence near their service site;
- Move 50 miles or more from their HOR to their service site.

What financial assistance do VISTA candidates receive for relocation expenses?

1. **Relocation Travel Allowance:** The allowance is based on the direct mileage between the HOR and the site. This allowance, up to \$1,000, regardless of the mode of transportation used, includes:
 - A relocation mileage rate set by the VISTA program (23 cents/mile as of 6/1/12)
 - A shipping rate for shipment of personal belongings (10 cents/mile as of 6/1/12)
2. **Settling-in Allowance:** Candidates relocating to serve are eligible to receive a settling-in allowance. The Corporation State Office may authorize the allowance for an initial assignment or a project transfer. This allowance is intended to cover initial moving expenses (security deposit, utility deposit, etc.). The amount, which may not exceed \$550, is determined by the Corporation State Director; therefore, requests for settling-in allowance should be directed to the Corporation State Office. The settling-in allowance is subject to federal income tax withholding, and it is disbursed with the first regular biweekly living allowance payment.

What must candidates consider when planning relocation travel?

Before committing to relocate to serve in VISTA, candidates are expected to:

1. Weigh the professional and personal costs against the benefits of relocation when accepting a position.
2. Know the amount of the Relocation Travel Allowance they are entitled to and make informed decisions regarding arranging their relocation travel.
3. Recognize that relocation assistance provided by the VISTA program may not cover all expenses that they incur or alleviate all inconveniences. The VISTA program will provide a reasonable allowance to defray the costs of travel necessary to enter and close service.
4. Understand that relocation is intended to match the best candidate to a specific position to benefit the project and the community. The financial assistance for relocation travel may not fully meet an individual's hopes or preference.
5. At the end of service, members are expected to arrange their return travel to their home or record. Members receive the same relocation travel allowance at the end of their service term. Members need to plan their finances accordingly.

How do VISTA candidates request relocation travel assistance?

Candidates must complete the [Relocation Travel Form](#) and submit it to the state office. The state office reviews the form and then submits it to the VISTA Member Support Unit (VMSU). The VMSU must receive the form no later than 35-days prior to the PSO the candidate is scheduled to attend. A [Relocating to Serve Fact Sheet](#) and check-list is available on the VISTA Campus for VISTAs who are relocating to serve.

Who approves requests for relocation travel assistance?

The VMSU approves all relocation travel requests. Candidates must not arrange relocation travel until they have received written approval from the VMSU.

What if a candidate relocates to serve without written approval?

Candidates who relocate without written approval from the VMSU are responsible for arranging their own travel to PSO and receive reimbursement, if at all, only to the amount VISTA policy permits.

How do candidates travel from their home of record (HOR) to the service site?

Once the VMSU has approved the candidate's request to relocate, and has been told the amount of financial assistance s/he will receive, the candidate arranges travel from the HOR to the service site. The means of travel is up to the candidate —air, rail, bus or personal vehicle.

Candidates also choose their dates of travel in coordination with and permission of the VMSU. Candidates may relocate prior to attending PSO, after attending PSO, or attend PSO on the way to the service site. Dates and itinerary must be approved by the VMSU.

I understand candidates arrange their own relocation travel from HOR to service site. How do candidates who relocate to serve travel to Pre-Service Orientation (PSO)?

- **Travel by Car:** If approved by the VMSU to travel to PSO by car, candidates are reimbursed for mileage from the approved departure point to the PSO at a rate set by the VISTA program (23 cents/mile, as of 6/1/2012). Candidates can request reimbursement for the cost of tolls and parking at the PSO with receipts.
- **Travel by Air, Rail, and Bus (Ticketed Travel):** For ticketed travel, the VMSU will arrange and purchase tickets for candidates to travel from the approved departure point to the PSO location. Candidates receive an itinerary by email at least a week prior to the scheduled departure date. Candidates can request reimbursement for the cost of getting to the airport (or station) and up to one checked bag with receipts.

VISTA Travel to Training

Who may request travel to training?

The VISTA program arranges and pays for cost effective means of travel to Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) and Leaders Orientation for all authorized travelers – most candidates and members.

What are the expectations around travel to training?

Individuals authorized to travel to training must do so in a manner that is cost effective while recognizing issues of safety and travel time. This means traveling by the most realistic and economical mode of travel and, if flying, traveling out of the closest major (not regional) airport.

How do VISTA candidates request travel to training?

Candidates must complete the Trainee Registration Profile (TRP) on My.AmeriCorps.gov 35-days prior to the start date of the PSO to which they are assigned.

Who approves the request?

Travelers indicate their preferred modes of travel and departure points on their TRP for travel to and from training. The VISTA Training Unit (VTU) determines whether the preferred mode of travel is the most reasonable and cost effective. The VTU communicates directly with the traveler if there are any changes to the preferred mode or routing indicated by the traveler in the TRP.

How are candidates reimbursed for travel to training?

- **Travel by Car:** If approved by the VTU to travel to PSO by car, candidates are reimbursed for mileage from the approved departure point to the PSO at a rate set by the VISTA program (23 cents/mile, as of 6/1/2012). Candidates can request reimbursement for the cost of tolls and parking at the PSO with receipts.
- **Travel by Air, Rail, and Bus (Ticketed Travel):** For ticketed travel, the VTU will arrange and purchase tickets for candidates to travel from the approved departure point to the PSO. Candidates receive an itinerary by email at least a week prior to the scheduled departure date. Candidates can request reimbursement for the cost of getting to the airport (or station) and up to one checked bags with receipts.

VISTA Close of Service Travel

The VISTA travel policy governing close of service travel changed on April 9, 2012 and affects members closing serving on or after June 1, 2012. For an update of changes, see the [Close of Service Travel Fact Sheet](#) on the VISTA Campus.

Who is eligible for close of service travel benefits?

VISTA members who received relocation assistance at the start of service for relocating 50 miles or more from their permanent address (home of record or HOR) to a new residence near their service site.

How do candidates travel from the service site to their home of record (HOR)?

Members are responsible for arranging their own travel from the service site to HOR. Members may choose the mode of travel that is most convenient for them and may travel on any date after the final day of service. Members receive a relocation travel allowance to off-set the cost of returning home. The VISTA program does not purchase travel at the end of service.

What is the Relocation Travel Allowance?

The allowance is based on the direct mileage between the service site and HOR. This allowance, up to \$1,000, regardless of the mode of transportation used, includes:

- A relocation mileage rate set by the VISTA program (23 cents/mile as of 6/1/12)
- A shipping rate for shipment of personal belongings (10 cents/mile as of 6/1/12)

Receipts are not required to collect this allowance.

How are members reimbursed for travel expenses?

The VMSU sends a close of service travel voucher to the member through the Member Portal, My.AmeriCorps.gov. Members print the form, sign it, and return it to the VMSU. After receipt of the voucher, the VMSU electronically transfers the allowance to the member's bank account through the US Treasury within eight weeks.

Summary of Changes

This summary reflects major changes to the VISTA Travel Policy. The changes affect relocation travel, only. The new policy was issued on April 9, 2012, effective June 1, 2012.

Relocation Travel for Nationally Recruited Volunteers (NRVs)		
Topic	2011 Policy	June 1, 2012 Policy
Travel Arrangement	VISTA program arranges and pays for ticketed travel; drivers are reimbursed for mileage at varying rates.	Candidates arrange their own relocation travel and receive a travel allowance based on mileage between HOR and site.
Review and approval of requests	Corporation State Office reviews and approves requests	VISTA Member Support Unit reviews and approves requests
Routing	Standard routing is HOR-PSO-Site. Alternate routing requires approval from the state office.	Candidates may relocate prior or after PSO.* <i>*Some restrictions apply. VMSU approves final routing.</i>
Rates and Reimbursement	Three separate rates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 23 cents/mile for gas - \$25/100 miles for baggage - \$10/100 miles (with V-81) 	One Relocation Travel Allowance that includes mileage and baggage. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 23 cents/mile for gas - 10 cents/mile for baggage <i>*V-81 has no bearing on the rate</i>
Baggage	Candidates received a separate rate for baggage (\$25/100 miles)	Baggage is part of the Relocation Travel Allowance
Close of Service	VISTA program arranges and pays for ticketed travel; drivers are reimbursed for mileage.	All members arrange their own travel and receive travel allowance based on mileage between site and HOR.

Forms and Deadlines

Form	Use	Process	Deadline for Submission to CSO	Notes
Relocation Travel Form	For VISTA candidates who are relocating to serve. Documents preferred date, route and mode(s) of travel.	<p>Provided by the sponsor, completed by the candidate, and submitted to the CSO. The CSO forwards to the VMSU for final review and approval.</p> <p>Available on the VISTA Campus</p>	<p>40 days prior to the first day of PSO for which the candidate is scheduled to attend.</p> <p>Any changes to relocation travel must be submitted no later than 15 days before departure.*</p> <p>If the candidate is training deferred, the “Relocation Travel Form” must be submitted no later than 15 days before departure from HOR.</p>	* Changes must be the result of an emergency (e.g., critical illness or death of an immediate family member).
Trainee Registration Profile (TRP)	Documents points and modes of travel for PSO and other special needs.	Completed in the My.AmeriCorps.gov portal by all candidates attending PSO and reviewed by the Corporation State Office.	<p>35 days prior to the first day of PSO.</p> <p>Any changes to PSO travel must be submitted no later than 15 days prior to the first day of PSO.*</p>	* Changes must be the result of an emergency (e.g., critical illness or death of an immediate family member).
Use of Vehicles or Public Transportation (V-81)	<p>Reflects that a VISTA is required to use his/her vehicle or public transportation for service and that the sponsoring organization will reimburse the member for service related travel (such as travel to community partner agencies).</p> <p>This need is based on activities identified in the Project Plan and the VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) and does not include the daily commute or other non-service trips.</p>	Completed by the candidate, reviewed and approved by the sponsor, and submitted to the Corporation State Office (CSO). The form is available on the candidate’s homepage of the My.AmeriCorps.gov portal and the process for submission and approval is automated.	As needed.	<p>The V-81 is not used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for commuting purposes • for personal travel • for calculating relocation travel or travel to training reimbursements <p>\</p>